



In the moving from one place to another, even if the transfer is only temporary, there is a fusion of the new and the old, the present and the past, and there is a distancing and a drawing closer. Wayne Ray, in his poetry and prose on a journey to Fredericton, New Brunswick in 2002 has created in his portrayed encounters on the road and in this new city a melancholy, yet hopeful feeling of distancing and connecting, and a sense of individuals searching and being in two places at once. The effects are subtle and lyrical giving the collection a variety of perspectives that are entertaining and thoughtful.

David Fraser (British Columbia)

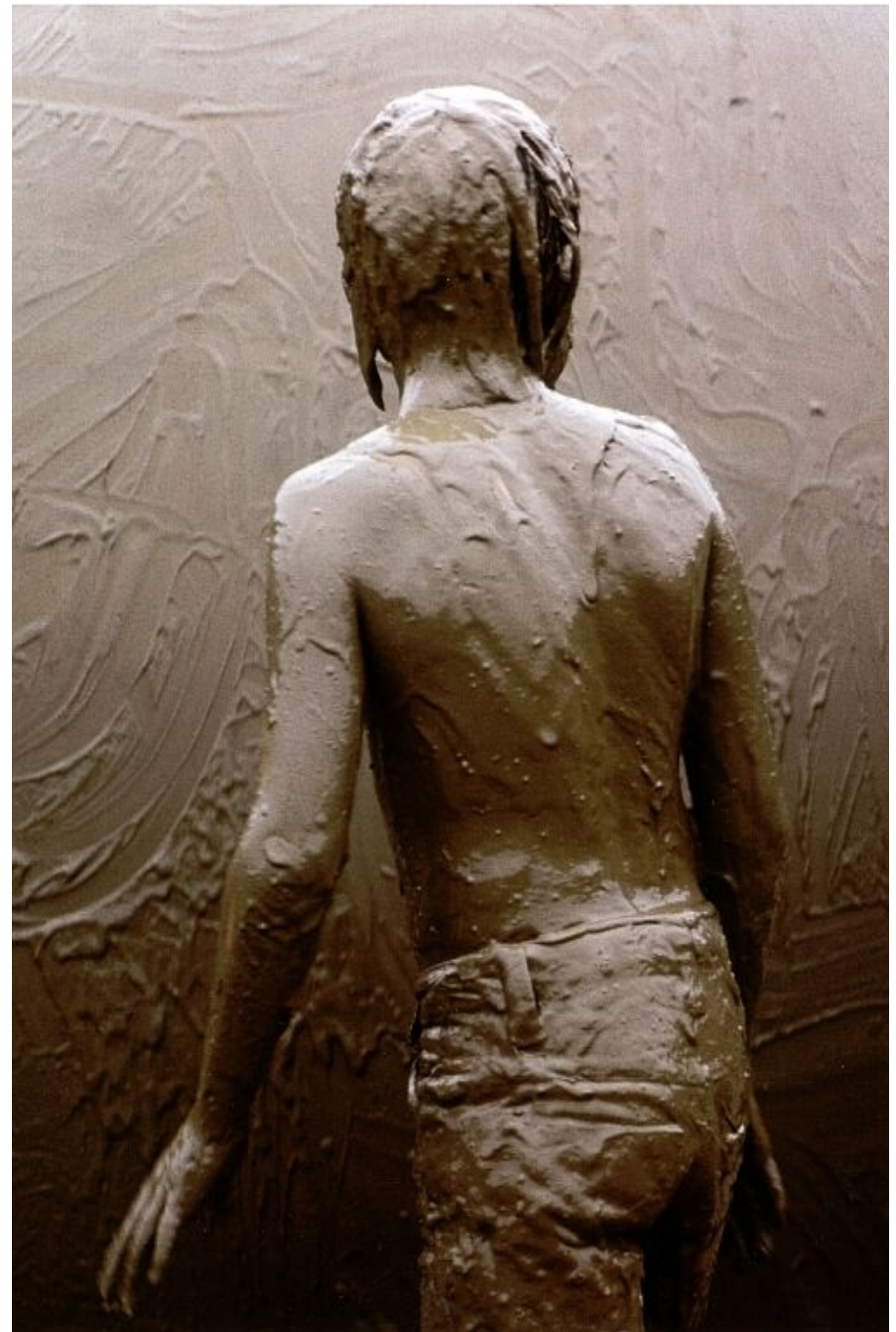
Wayne has a wonderful gift for the vignette . . an unusual storytelling technique remarkable for its conciseness and exotic in its themes. [Giants of the North, Third Eye 1992]

Rosemary Aubert (Toronto)

[Wayne's] writing brings so many elements into work and none obscure the meaning, this is fresh, moving, alive work. [Giants of the North, Third Eye 1992]

Ken Faloon Halifax Nova Scotia

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**going down goose lane
toward broken jaw:**

fredericton poems & stories

Wayne Ray

Harmonia Press

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In September 2002, I was transferred to Fredericton New Brunswick to work at the Canada Post plant on Waggoners Lane. I spent every day, at home, writing in one form or another. Mostly, I typed my journals into the computer to use for future prose and short stories I was working on. I bought a leather-bound blank book when I moved there and used it for new poetry.

While in Fredericton, I edited and produced several poetry anthologies for the Canadian Poetry Association: London Chapter and The Ontario Poetry Society.

These are the poems I wrote over the next two years and placed in the leather-bound book. They are in chronological order and include poems written to me by friends and lovers I met along the way.

I would like to thank Nami Ohara for translating all my haiku into Japanese. These haiku poems were published in 2003 by Mercutio Press in Montreal Quebec under the title *In A Dream*.

Some of these poems have appeared in TOPS anthologies, *POEMATA*, *Tear The Rust Off My Heart*, *EOA: prose*, *In A Dream*, *Golestaneh (Iran)*

Dedication:

for jones upon learning of his suicide:

in a dream
they become one
moth and flame

Dedicated also to my old friend Joe Blades [Broken Jaw Press], who lived down the street from me when I was there; Mia, Claudette, and all my new friends and my workmates on the afternoon shift at 203 Waggoners Lane, Canada Post, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

And for Pat Carlson who wrote several of the poems

You said hello with goodbye on your lips

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Preface

Going down Goose Lane toward Broken Jaw by Wayne Ray A Review by David Fraser

In the moving from one place to another, even if the transfer is only temporary, there is a fusion of the new and the old, the present and the past, and there is a distancing and a drawing closer. Wayne Ray, in his poetry and prose on a journey to Fredericton, New Brunswick in 2002 has created in his portrayed encounters on the road and in this new city a melancholy, yet hopeful feeling of distancing and connecting, and a sense of individuals searching and being in two places at once. The effects are subtle and lyrical giving the collection a variety of perspectives that are entertaining and thoughtful.

In the opening dedication, his haiku in a dream/they become one/moth and flame sets the stage for a Zen-like fusion. The following haiku allude to glimpses of place and relationships and we are drawn into poems that are full of reminiscences on love and relationships that were or could have been. There is an atmosphere of a dream in the recreations, and the fragile vulnerability within the relationships.

In *Cora's: At the Window, Behind the Pane*, the narrator is [at a table watching] catching a glimpse of a waitress dreaming, lost in laughter and wonders where are you my friend. In *Going Home* we get a sense of place, of the fall the Old Loyalist Cemetery with its inhabitants covered with the season's leaves, - a sense of things needing to be done, an impatience to be leaving but also a feeling of a beginning. In fact, throughout the

collection there are comings and goings, leavings as odyssey that are both physical and psychological.

The poet as voyeur is at work here from his first watching the waitress at the glass of a Queen Street café, to observing a friend or a lover in Cynthia Bachelor at the mall, not approaching to say hello or goodbye but rather holding the image and her graceful face frozen in his memory. There is a melancholy longing in these distanced observations, in this waking, wondering, wandering mind that speculates if & all you see is someone in the distance and your eyes say you wish it were me in *What if & You Walk by Me*. In *Talking to Friends*, the narrator says to the person fixated on the internet connections of chat room cyber-friendships Too many months you've felt alone and he stands behind her like a shadow wishing she'd turn off the monitor so she could see his reflection reaching out for her.

One thinks of the lonely hunting of the heart where characters touch and almost touch, connect and almost connect. Three friends at a cozy Valentine's Day dinner an odd number sipping wine, dissolving the icing flowers of the cake in their mouths but it all ends with we dissolve the petals on our tongues, very sensual, and go home alone. In *Whippitt Lounge*, a rollicking romp of beer sloshing, gyrating and groping as in former college tavern days, the narrator is high on the moment and the memory, but wakes up in his own bed alone, pockets empty and we sense there is more of the emptiness lurking in the shadows. In the collaborative poem *You Cannot Give a Heart That Has Been Taken*, a great title, this theme of love and longing, memory and melancholy flows out in wonderful lines

such as gathering shadows about you to keep you warm
at night, the drums of singers & wails the longing,
thorns long ago tearing at the flesh, burning memory
on my life/leave a sunburn on my heart.

There is always the vulnerability in relationships,
a sense of sacrifice as in Romeo and Juliet: prick of the
dagger. It is the pain of love that is spoken.

for daggers deep they have known
and sleep in quiet peace, together sewn.

In Not Looking to be Protected from Liking You there
is an irony in the title when we hear I found you tearing
down the heart wall to my house.

In Sego Road the metaphor of the highway, the
journey becomes linked to friendship and the journey of
a relationship. Here the signs are blurred on the other
side but on his side your name and the/remaining
mileage to your door is clear. Other poems are more
objective and allude to the war in Iraq, Princess Diana's
response if she were still with us, a rant to George Bush
and a letter home from a body bag.

The poems in this collection are narrative
reminiscences, lyrical meditations that illustrate an actual
journey over a space of time but also an internal journey,
a reflection that takes us time after page through
pleasant and painful memories and re-creations.
The second half of the collection is in the form of
connected pieces of slice of life, short fiction that
compliment the poetry. Here again characters are always
on the move, or wanting to go. Ryan, a recurring
character, is in the process of leaving London in the first

piece. He struggles to set things in order while lumbered
by a metaphorical hitchhiker, Jessica. In the second
piece, actually titled Leaving London, he is physically
on the road engaged in a random act of kindness
picking up a one-legged hitchhiker. In the third story,
Brinda is high in the sky flying to Dublin to meet a
friend/possible lover who she hasn't seen in thirty years.
She looks down from the plane and sees the solitary car
that could be Ryan's on the Trans Canada Highway and
wonders about the lonely traveler and speculates if he
ever looks up to see her plane in the sky. From the
previous story we know that he does look up and sees
the vapor trail cutting across the sky heading east. In
Plaster Rock, a character, Peter, drives a truck across a
road leading to the Trans Canada Highway on an
intersecting course to Ryan. He has stolen something that
is hidden under the flapping tails of a tarp covering the
truck bed, and he is haunted by an apparition of an old
man. In the last story Karen plans a costume party, picks
up a close friend, Sarah who is internally bruised and
scarred by her insignificant other, and in another. The
stories do not end, just as life and relationships do not
end, but continue and evolve.

There are mysteries. Leviathan, Ryan's cat from
London, doesn't seem to be with him and appears to
have gone missing. An empty cage is in the back seat of
his Corsica as he heads east. Karen's cat, Kafka, is left
wedged in the hole (in the window screen) that he had
created. Sarah's gray cat is remarkably similar to Buster,
Allen's cat. We get a hovering sense in these stories that
characters desperately need to connect and the cats seem
to exist on the periphery as surrogates for affection.

We meet Ryan through a stream of consciousness describing in two paragraphs all the repairs and renovations that he had been putting off that he has now been doing, now that he is renting the house and preparing to leave for Fredericton. In his kindness, he rescues a friend who owns an art gallery store, by agreeing to get a homeless, disturbed young woman, Jessica, out of the store. This one act of kindness is followed by many more as he helps Jessica, a dependent, yet independent, trusting, yet not trusting woman who is her own worst enemy. Ryan is a Good Samaritan who gives her shelter, lots of comfort, friendship and a place to stay. He even loans her his old Hudson Bay car blanket, which he knew would never be returned. The blanket is symbolic of the friendship, the empathy; the caring that would never be reciprocated. He says no gratitude, just want, want, want. The tale is a bizarre account of two characters connecting but not connecting really. Jessica rearranges all the books on the shelves of his library, a helpful gesture, but the arrangement is by book color, a spectrum with the reds and greens on one side and the yellows, blues and whites on the other row of glass shelves.

Jessica showers incessantly and at length. These symbolic acts of cleansing finally get to Ryan and he cuts off the water, which brings about a bizarre and potentially deadly reaction. If Ryan didn't need to escape or run away from anything, he does now as is suggested by the hitchhiker in the next story.

In Leaving London, Ryan says that the hitchhiker is unlike anyone I had ever given a ride to. Here is a man who has just come with nothing, didn't tell

anyone where he was going, can't recall the name of the town he now lives in or the name of the place where he works, and has recently lost his wallet and ID in the car of some so-called friends while on a drinking spree in Cornwall. Images from the works of Kafka jump to mind. Ryan says I knew where I was going and where I was coming from, but a friend has told him, I hope you find what you are looking for. The characters seem to be in contrast. Ryan, as he drops off the hitchhiker, advises him to stop running away from the life you had and to go home. However, we get a sense that there are similarities. The hitchhiker can't see the similarity between Edmonton where he came from and Edmunston where he is now, but Ryan sees the connection coming from London Ontario where there is a Woodstock close by and the Woodstock New Brunswick that he is driving toward. Maybe there is a bit of T.S. Eliot here?

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning
The end is where we start from &

Brinda on her trip to Dublin in answer to an old male friend's invitation asks, What was a week out of one's life anyway? Maybe that week makes all the difference. Maybe a year in Fredericton also makes all the difference. Certainly the collection of poems and pieces of short fiction arising out of that year away reflect a sense of the encounters, the moth and the flame in the dedication haiku, the connections, the reminiscences, the work of memory and reflection, the journey which is not so much a running way, but rather a running toward.

This is a thoughtful slice of life collection that challenges the reader to delve deeper into the psyches of its characters.

Haiku from In A Dream:
[www.mercutiopress.com]

Serving Chai
in the once empty room
the warmth of you

Stirring noodles
over the hot oven fire
sipping tea

Sipping on Green Tea
across from Old Loyalist Cemetery
long before Vimy

Fresh coffee
after love settles the air
aroma

If I had a pen
I would write a haiku
about this moment

Outside Tobique
Nation Drumming Circle
Japanese tourist

CORA S: At The Window, Behind The Pane

02/11/2002 *(for stephanie)*

behind the counter,
behind the coffee, eggs,
scurrying to and fro, tea,
customers orders, ins
and outs, lights, noise,
cash register jingling,

I catch a glimpse
of you dreaming, lost
in another world, not
the one that inhabits
this queen street restaurant

where are you my friend
lost in laughter, somewhere?

BREAKFAST AT CORA S

08/11/2002

ah napkin
where have you been
below the nose
or on the chin
are you full of coffee
cream or tea
is there space enough
left for me for I ve
dropped some goop
on my legs and i
think it smells of eggs
and after i wipe
I ll leave it again, so
someone else can say. . .

ah napkin
where have you been

GOING HOME

17/11/2002

Sitting here drinking Green Tea,
listening to Enya on the radio
and thinking of this crisp cold day.
One of the many leafless Fall days
when the grey squirrels are
the only living beings around.

The blue sky hangs on branches
across the street at Old Loyalist Cemetery
where Boer War soldiers and
early settlers remember summer.
Their ghosts covered with Fall colors
as they hibernate for oncoming Winter.

Green Tea warms the body so.
Pushes the sweat out of my pores.
I should be off to the Saturday Market
instead of sipping from this large cup
in this quiet New Brunswick apartment.

Really, I should be out on the highway
and on that silver bird from here
but the soft sounds of Enya, pull me
back to this warm cup of tea,
pack my suitcase and leave.

CYNTHIA BACHELOR

29/11/2002

As I was leaving London,
two days before the silver wing flight,
I wandered through the mall
and saw you standing there.
Sleek glass counter ending
at your elegant dressed body,
golden hair accenting the beauty of you.
The room was quiet, and you
were thinking of something
or just reading, I don't know
but there was such a serenity
in that moment that my intrusion
to say goodbye would have ruined
the photography of you.

Now, I think I should have stayed.
Instead, I stood and waved
but I will always remember your face
and your ever created grace.

ARE YOU AFRAID TO DIE?

21/01/2003 (for Linda Ham)

I sit at work tonight
among the postal sort cases and
wonder if the question should have been,
am I afraid to live?

To Live: to create, to enjoy, to be oneself,
to be proud of creating and of just being.

At home I sit and type.
Typing well worn and often unreadable handwriting.
Creativity and life,
creativity and living, but what
am I afraid of, if I am indeed afraid?

Being here alone is not
as nice as walking across the street
with someone you love or sharing things
in a moving car. Dinner for two.
There are memories out there.

Now I just think of coming home, I
just need to be there
after five months in this forested province,
homesick for friends.

WHAT IF... YOU WALK BY ME

(From Heather 02/2003)

What if ... you walk by me
your eyes teased by another
could I approach you from behind
with the same intensity?
What if ... I lower my head
would you see eyes teasing yours,
top of head would not say the same thing.
What if... I see a weak smile, followed by
groping for something to say, my words
sounding hollow in my head.
What if... all you see is someone in the
distance and your eyes say
you wish it were me.

THE BED CREAKS FROM MY WEIGHT... ALONE

(From Heather 02/2003)

The bed creaks from my weight ... alone,
Another word has caressed my soul,
My feet get cold, my hands sweat,
Another word finds it mark.

A pause, silence steals time,
Another word could caress my soul,
I breathe in ... waiting.
Powerful, caressed by each word.

Does he know that the pen
is mightier than the sword?
I move just enough to breathe
No sound escapes from the pause.

Words have failed me again.
In time will words be actions?
Take me in your arms.
Let actions replace the words.

The bed creaks from the weight.
A pause ... to steal time,
let it be actions not words
that caress my soul.

BETWEEN SIPS OF WHITE WINE

14/02/2003 (For Lilli Ferguson and Joe Blades)

On Valentine's Day,
between sips of white wine
that can reveal too much
of my life at times,
I enjoy the company of friends
and think about the ocean,
waves that pushed my life
from the Pacific coastal waters
to splash upon my Grandparent's
Atlantic Fundy shores.

On Valentine's Day,
at this table set for three,
a blood-red, two-tiered cake
covered in flowers, waits the knife.

A sip of wine, a poet's words,
a smile, and thoughts of home
as my new friend reaches out
slices cake at each pink flower,
and we dissolve the petals
on our tongues and go home alone.

IN A DREAM

02/04/2003

In a dream, climbing brick steps
with their talus slope of chips,
I carry an old Penny-farthing,
my feet slip on the way up and
the bicycle drops to the ground.

Now, the wall is gone and I
descend the narrow bricked angle
to the bottom, sliding, slipping
into a high-ceilinged basement.
Brick steps now a crumbling chimney.

I am covered in dust, head to foot
with my 1994 journal in my left hand
open to a blank page in May
with only one penned entry:

*where is the here and now?,
the why and when of my journey?
Where did the wind blow my friends?
Where is the lost spirit that
inhabits the mortal soul? . . .*

the perpetual unanswered question.

WHIPPITT LOUNGE

08/04/2003

At the tavern on a Friday night
(if you can remember the tavern,
or the night for that matter),
dancing with your shoes off, amongst
the college kids, girating and groping
one other as if it were they, who
had discovered darkness and rhythm.
Your middle-aged eyes closed a moment,
expanding a college memory of your own,
running naked on the beach, or
breathing in your first kiss long ago.

Beer sloshing in your brain, sweat,
smoke, muscles, breasts, ashtrays,
and you lean back in your chair,
wake up in your own bed, alone,
call your best friend at noon
on the Saturday to find out why
your pockets are empty and your car
is parked safe but sideways
in the driveway after that Friday night.

ANN VALAVAARA

08/04/2003

This April winter has me bewildered.
Sleet rain and the trees are ice-laden,
falling down around town, chainsaws
reflected in the glassy branches.

When the noises of the city cease
and you close your eyes, let the cold wind
pink your cheeks, you can hear the
crack, crack, crack of the ice on wood.

This April winter has me remembering
a high school sweetheart, midwinter
freezing rain, near midnight and the city
under two inches of glass. Crunched walking
the sidewalk under near breaking wires
and trees. Walking her home, hand in hand,
first kiss beneath a frozen moon.

THE STAIN ON THE ROAD

10/04/2003

Several neighbors gathered
around my car today
under the moist grey clouds,
as I leaned against the door.
The stain on the asphalt
fresh, wet, ran uphill and
someone asked how it was to be,
that road stain near the motor,
near the tire, near my car.

Well, I said, staring down,
pointing across the street
to where I had earlier carried
her milch-filled body;

Well, I said:

Once upon a time
there were three little kittens
and a mother and a van.
Now there are only
three little kittens.
Everyone else is gone.

BANTING BUILDING U OF T

12/04/2003

Along the stone wall, Banting
Building, beside the street car tracks,
Prince Charles and Princess Diana
immortalized for almost a decade
in dark paint printed in huge
letters, criticizing either the marriage
or the divorce.
Prince Charles' opinion would be
in opposition to Diana's on the present graffiti,
replacing years of power washing
the old one, to become a clean wall.
Charles would uphold the present
British government's stand on
the crisis in the Middle East but I
can see Diana's fist in the air,
smiling to the television and yelling
Stop the war in Iraq! long after
someone had written Stuff the wedding!

SAM

15/04/2003 (for Sam K)

when at first we see
things of no mere mediocrity
and the void is filled from within
where once stood no thought of sin
and the eyes come close to light
and arms come down from heights
to wrap around you in the night
and ghosts of good lovers hover near
to comfort you from fear
and wake you from morning sleep
where once alone, now never weep

NOT LOOKING TO BE PROTECTED FROM LIKING YOU

22/04/2003 (For Sam K)

Not looking to be protected from liking you.
No need to guard the house from your heart.
Nor build a fence around my soul and skin.
No more protection from liking you, looking
for the lost key you just found in my mailbox.
I had been reading the letters backward and
the mail man was always coming to the door
slipping nothings through the slot until
I found you tearing down the heart wall to my house.

MY DEAR FRIEND

(after a poem for her)

My dear friend -

you write words inspired
by a moment shared,
what then could I ask,
if a lifetime be bared?
A minute in passing
were we allowed to partake,
but thoughts that lingered,
now we have to forsake.
Worlds apart,
I hesitated to explain,
for in doing so
I sweetened the pain.

Understand my friend -

I too share those dreams
you write of in sensuous rhyme;
arms that wrap around me each night,
I pray I will feel in time.
Yet reading once more the words on the page,
I tarry over a line that was penned
and cannot fathom the thoughts clouding your mind,
when 'ghosts of lovers' you did send.

For if you knew these demons that keep me from you,
you'd have erased writing of such sorrow
and left with thoughts of *comforting me from fear,*
and *where once alone, now never weep,* to follow.

So my dear friend -

I bid you good-bye, memories etched of that day
yearning to spend many more of the same,
and if, God willing, you should wander back here,
you'll find the window lit with a flame.
And I am asking you, please be patient for now
and see what destiny brings us in time,
and if ever you write words inspired by us,
please leave all my skeletons behind.

Sam K. /03

SEGO ROAD

27/04/2003 (For Maryanne Sego)

I miss you he said
to the open road, where
you were not there in
the seat beside me.
Hand extended to hold
a memory of you.
Driving the highway home
to the door of your heart.

Friendship Highway 101,
two lanes, both directions
but the signs are blurred
on the other side,
on mine, clear as sky, signs
with your name and the
remaining mileage to your door.

Stopping periodically for gas.

YOU CANNOT GIVE A HEART THAT HAS BEEN TAKEN...

(online collaboration poem with Maryanne Sego: for Harry Gatley)

you cannot give a heart that has been taken ...
a thief crept quietly into the night ...
what I m left with is merely part of who i am ...
an open cage empty with the weight of tears
for one last kiss...one fleeting moment to kiss ...
or a moment before the lips part
and the eyes open on memory
how loudly the silence pounds
echoing through a darkness that never lingers
just remember to breathe my heart silently sings
and that is all that remains
the shadow of love, the setting sun, waning moon
gathering shadows about you to keep you warm at night
from the people you call friends
the drums of singers ...wails the longing ...
skin of hand, touch of soul, breath of breast
each time he hits the skin ...the echoes of a hollowness.
trying to find a way to fill the void ...
the universe echoes and the void is too great
hit the skin, hit the skin again hear me
oh God listen to my cry
cause there is nothing left behind that skin,
to hurt no more ...
beaten down ... and torn ... bleeding ... there are no gods...
merely words ... formed by man... worn by women
on threaded hearts
to provide a false fortitude ...to be a lie
my gardens are filled with roses, and black-eyed susans...
Susan's petal's falling down around her ankles ...
thorns long ago tearing at the flesh, skin of my love
the winds blow from across the bay ...thrashing her.

blows hard and cold on this sun filled day
burning memory on my breast
just needs a bit of water is what the neighbours say
wear the ragged shirt outside ... let them see ...
let them see what he has done to me ... ragged shirt
torn and bleeding ...my lips locked shut ... i cannot speak..
damn you all ... cant you see ...
but I continue to beat the skin
cause the sound is not heard
watch the rose flowers continue to fall
petals ... of bleeding red ... purple and blue
under the cedar tree the swing that was made ...
swings back and forth ... with no one inside ...
and the cedars are bereft of bird song
save the swing creaking in the wind
no noise now, now love, no heart sound
save the beating of the skin
only flower petals gathering the dew in early morn
beating skin, beat in skin beat and the neighbours
walking by as they always do every morn
yes ... take this skin and toughen me like leather ...
rip off the shirt and beat my breasts hard
neighbours know not my pain my deep deep refrain
this song of the void ... his song
I am but a mandrake ... to you ... a woman
you tell what to do...
lost in the cow towing of generations of obedience
and you do not see this, this self serving
the flowers bloom only for you there is no we
the wind blows only to cool your brow
I've asked you to set me free .. .but you say you love me
black-eyed lazy susan's drop their seeds to the ground
and you as the bright light in my life
leave a sunburn on my heart
quietly ... silently ... the rains fall and wash them down

quiet, silent, falling like a veil
like my memories ... seeping ... I take off the ragged shirt
since others don't see ...
they continue to gather their seeds for the next spring..
they pack up their cars ... their belongings..
head back to the city ... and the doors are not locked
and my womb lies barren for your seed falls on other soil
fertilizes the other grass, not in this garden of life.

MOTHER'S DAY 2003 FOR CRIS 25/12/78

08/05/2003

Waiting for the spring rains
to clear the last of the snow,
and make way for the summer
this day is so cloudy cold.

Sipping Irish Cream at Second Cup
across the wet street from Goose Lane Editions,
thinking about younger brother born
half a century ago, this Mother's Day.

Not here to enjoy the East coast sun
or this heavy cleansing precipitation
or a loving Mother who remembers
what this day is really for; you and me.

If I close my eyes I see two boys
in an East Coast memory, running
home for lunch, from the beach
where she will always call our names.

EVERY 13,000 YEARS

18/05/2003

The day the Earth listened
to her own heartbeat sleep,
all too rhythmic shorelines pulse,
river veins fed ocean tide.

The day the Earth listened
to her labored sky-filled breathing,
village and city scarred skin and
to the endless grains of Human sand,
an ulcer burned in her molten mantle:
 steamed breath crept up
 air rose in Eros
 geysers melted glaciers
 ocean filled river beds and more
 tectonic plates shifted to form new skin.

The day the Earth listened
to her own heartbeat sleep,
the grains of Human sand become one
with the veins of ocean tide,
her redesigned skin,
wet with the wealth of water
absorbed their pulse of history with Hers.

The day the Earth was listening,
She shifted on her axis, exchanging Poles
in her symbiotic journey around Mother Sun.

NARCOLEPTIC SOMNAMBULIST

21/05/2003

At the edge of the yard where she
fell asleep standing in the sun,
the Trumpet Vine crawled up
her shoes and crept around her ankles
gently making its way up both her legs
in the hot summer sun and twisted across
her thighs, Trumpet Vine bloom
just below her navel. Orange blossoms.
No Faeries here, no dancing, just joy
and soft breathing narcoleptic things,
as the vine slid around her breasts
from where a bead of sweat softly fell.
She smiled in her dreams, felt his arms
around her body and as the vine
inched and inched upward she thought,
what a gentle kiss upon my neck,
as she became covered in blossoms,
he whispered isle of view in her ear.
She began to wake and thought of walking.
The Trumpet Vine eased off her skin
and slid to her feet as she only saw
the hose in her hand and water
flooding the garden as the Earth listened.

WICCAN WEDDING

27/05/2003 (Carol) (later for Sandy & Mardy)

Upon waking, ivory-handled dagger
placed silver edge near my heart.
Five bronze double-edged daggers
random placement: arms, legs, tummy, breast.
I see you through the thin veil placed
across my sleep encrusted eyes, cloaked
in a crimson gown I had not seen before.
My hands are not tied but I cannot move.
You are holding a sword and reading
words I don't understand or recognize.
Oh to be a dream or in a dream,
to be a shadow on the ceiling more than this!
Secrets unfolding in the morning air,
but your eyes are calm and I feel more trust
than the thrust of a dagger conjured up
in my waking wondering wandering mind.
Then I see the candles placed around the bed
and the white flowers draped in pearls,
you, holding out the two silver rings,
the ceiling light forming a halo around
your head and now I remember saying I do.

HIS WORDS DON WINGS

(after a poem for her)

His words don wings;
flights started with a flutter of sorrow,
end with a quivering touch
a touch too deep for even his own imagination
to mine from the belly of text.

He answers his own questions of misgivings
about love gone awry through his poems
of angst and pain,
a pain shielded only by his armour
of paper and Montblanc Sword.

He pens of places he has yet to visit
and thoughts he has yet to form;
a hereafter cast of memories -
memories of what was and will be again,
time after page.

He sits alone and reads his words,
blurring the dots above the i's;
this is his life as it was once before -

before he touched the pain
of a memory.

Sam K/ 03

DANTE S SISTER

02/06/2003 (*for Marie Alighieri*)

As I slowly turn to stone
Since for me you are gone
My heart shall be the last
To become this icy glass
Lips once warm will slowly die
Never again a you and I
But through my eyes you may see
A memory once of you and me.

ROMEO & JULIET: prick of the dagger

08/06/2003 (*For Sam s knife collection*)

Pray tell thy dagger sting
shall stay thy sheath and harbor well.
A dagger sheathed is only for show,
A dagger unsheathed is the dagger I know.
Embedded just below the skin,
save the thrust of sin,
a dagger blade is sure to shine,
and yet the thrust is so sublime
so as to hide the tears of blood
and rub the skin such,
as a dagger blade slides so close
to touch but not tear thy lust,
and as she lay, the dagger hidden,
a sword she dreams
but dreams are forbidden,

his blade inserted in her sheath,
blooded together two and as one,
red heart s liquid drains their sun.
She ran her blade down his back
and there upon the skin attack.
Blood red track, two blades front and back,
silvered handled sheath and all
and as she fell so did he fall,
embedding daggers one and all
and in the ecstasy of death
did she see his blade
in her hearts forever shade.
Be sweet death and life once sown
for daggers deep they have known
And sleep in quiet peace, together sewn.

GOODBYE ON YOUR LIPS

11/06/2003 (*From Pat Carlson*)

You said hello with goodbye on your lips.
Reaching out from inside your sparsely furnished room,
Your heart in search of someone,
Your life's direction neglected.

Reaching out, the universe responding ,
I find the poet guy,
who is my shadow.
Recognizing my needs; to touch, to be touch,
to talk, to listen, to share, to feel.

Is it safe for two people to be together,
who fall in love so easily?
You with your cave dwelling ways
and me with the world to save.

Problem solver and procrastinator, dare they mix?
I ask the question knowing full well,
the answer leads to tears.

At that moment,
Yet to come,
When goodbye must be said,
Will you also cry with me?

I think so.

CORN

15/06/20003 (*for Joan Mais Canton*)

After I found out my great
grandfather was a Cherokee
I learned that a symbol,
universal in nature,
defined that southern tribe.

Far distant now I sit
in this small restaurant, staring
out the window at a gray sky
that once graced our ancestors.

This small connection between us,
synchronistic at best, is
pronounced the same no matter
how it is spelled. How, you say?

Maize trop facile, mon ami!
Mais, tu prononce comme ca.

A WHISPER ON THE WIND

*Hearing about my missing friend, and Wayne leaving.
(from Pat Carlson)*

Hearing your voice,
a whisper on the wind,
angels breathing softly
in my ear.

Dreams, reality missing
consciousness lapsing
fate or faith restoring,
replacing,
remaking,
resounding.

When last I heard your voice,
I gasped and have not yet taken
a new breath.

(THE SEQUEL)

UPON PARTING

28/06/2003 (From Pat Carlson)

Will you remember me,
When Fall touches down in London?
Will your lips remember the touch and feel of our kiss,
when last you wanted me?

Linger here a little longer,
while fire burns in your loins,
and you reach out for me with passion,
not regret.

Touch me with your soft strength,
that I may remember your embrace,
that hot, summer day in June.

Kiss me now, not with goodbye on your lips,
as you once did.
But, instead, with disappointment in your leaving.

TEMPORARY LOVERS

30/06/2003 (*From Pat Carlson*)

Awakening I did not want you gone,
Fall was months away,
and I could enjoy you til then.

Suddenly, your news arrived.
Tomorrow became today,
future became present.
Yet, I am not ready to say goodbye.

Will you be my lover,
ere you go?
The door just opened remains ajar.
The heart awaits on hinges.

DUSTLESS ROAD

09/07/2003 (*for Pat Carlson*)

Down the wet and dustless road,
came a stranger dancing so,
wanting to let his burden go,
stopped but once to lighten his load.

On a path which led not far,
from dustless road to garden shed,
he was in want to lay his head,
and gaze by evening upon a star.

Wondering about the life he had,
always dancing to hide the sad,
the smiles that wash away the mad,
dustless roads that made him glad.

The birds were chirping in the air,
dragon flies feeding up above,
robins thinking of only love,
the stranger woke without a care.

To find a lady beside his bed,
morning sun reflecting in her hair,
wild roses round them everywhere,
and he knew why here, he had been led.

THE CHESS BOARD OF LIFE

22/07/2003 (*From Pat Carlson*)

The Chess Board,
temporarily positioned
anticipating the next move.
In stillness it awaits
the challenge,
the game.

Your move, you retreat

as London calls,
no castling allowed.

Each player takes its turn,
as one by one the game succumbs
to the insights of the mind.
Leaving no chance for winners
as the King surrenders,
to his past.

(Wayne is moving in 5 days)

LOCUST

01/08/2003 (*for Marie Alighieri*)

When he found her, barely breathing,
bound to the trunk of the Black Locust,
he pulled her spine pricked body down
to rest on the green green grass, red
blood seeping slowly from her white skin.

On her back, on the ground, breathing.
He slowly laid her down, breathing,
and wondered how and when and why.

The blue sky will tell no secrets,
the wind listens but has blown by.
Rocks and trees absorb words but he
could not see past blood stained skin, and wept.

This hard pain, locust needle pricking,
willows weeping, pines pining, spruce
gum forming amber while Dawn Redwood
gave up her branches to heal the wounds.

He placed her on her back, on the grass
and laid the redwood branches to cover
her skin and pain and watched in quiet awe
as they absorbed the red blood and stains.

And though she was alive and free
of the locusts barbed black kiss,
she awoke under the star filled sky,
coils of rope still tied to her wrists.

TALKING TO FRIENDS

14/10/2003 (For Samantha Squire)

Too many months you've felt alone
even with the noise of so-called friends
pulling you from near to far.

Too many months you've felt alone
in a crowded chat room, names
confused by software & hard drives.

Too many months you've faced alone
the monitor screen, keyboard, cam,
passing up the clear blue sky.

If you took the time to close off
and see the reflection in front of you
you would see me just behind the chair,
hand reaching out for your shoulder.

ROOM MATES: Samantha & Jen S.

16/11/2003

Sitting in the Community Health Clinic
between unrelated drug-induced
conversations, crack cocaine and
long-term tardive dyskinesia & schizophrenia,
trying to outdo each other amongst
the alcoholics, deviants and the all
too busy Public Health Nurses, I wait
patiently for two hours just to be a friend.

I was thinking of you and your
calm face, standing patiently as well,
right hand stirring the slow pasta,
awaiting my return, late for lunch.

MEMORY OF YOUR SMILE

30/12/2003 (for Christine Pike)

This entire year has been a forest,
well at least walking into it.
First the path went so smooth,
floor was clear, trees spaced apart, green.
I could name them with no problem,
but then the skies began to darken
brush, fallen branches, skunkweed, mallow,
ironwood, thorn bush and locust grew.

Once you've ventured halfway in, you're
actually on your way out you think, but
the forest is still there, and you
don't think to climb up to see the sky.

It was at that time of misadventure
that your name appeared in print
and etched itself upon my mind,
to ease the distance of the long mile,
to ponder on the memory of your smile.

QUEEN'S PAWN 2

(for Christine Pike)

To love you more is the distance,
the struggle to connect with you.
Queen's Pawn 2, King's Pawn 1,
to place in all sorts of ways
the arrow of Cupid's bow,
to erect bridges across the chasm
of our separate lives, King's Bishop 4,
body posture, nuances of hand, a kiss.
Check, and if you do not move,
if your smile and gaze are not forgotten,
Check-Mate, the pressure of your hand
can hide my eyes, prolong the wait,
Bishop's Pawn 1 is the game of love, not lust.

GEORGE!

Poets For Peace

What is it you saw or didn't see
when you walked into that country,
blinded by glory
the ins and outs
lights and oil
sand and stone
Burkha and bazooka.

What is it you saw or didn't see
before dropping terror on that innocent country,
sitting in a tavern on that Friday night,
if you can remember the tavern
or the night for that matter,
planning everyone else's life.
It was the night before giving the orders:
GO TO WAR! KEEP THE PEACE!

You thought you were protecting
the world from terrorists,
forcing your democracy on
Allah Akbar,
inflaming the Arab Fatwah
captured on Al Gazirah.

George!!

Believe me when I say
you won't be remembered for your vision
as Commander in Chief
of the US Military and Coalition of the Willing.

You think you are every man
and all men, except the French
whom you now despise,
so I guess you will never come
across Voltaire who wrote about you
200 years ago when he said:

**Every man is guilty of the good
he did not do**

LETTER HOME FROM A BODY BAG

(Poets For Peace)

This is my last letter home,
just enough time to say goodbye
to dad and mom, all my friends,
roses in the hedge,
the street corner poet selling words,
the street corner church selling words,
the street walker selling words.

This is to be my last letter home,
to Tom, Dick, Sally, Fred, Spot and Sue.
If I could only be there to see the looks
on their faces but I m going to war
and they wouldn't recognize me
or my street corner face.
My camouflaged face.

This should be my last letter home,
where in my old bedroom sat my trunk
filled with old letters, old dreams,
uniform and ammo case, journals.
No one will read them because I never
sparked a magic fire in their hearts
strong enough to melt the stones and ice
in their illiterate minds

Is this my last letter home,
where, when I was there,

the light was on,
the day I ran away to join the war.
Reach out and read me.
Read my books, plays, poetry,
never more those false smiles when I call.

This is to be my last letter home,
one copy to you, one to her and
one to each friend who greeted me first,
smiled, saved a life, shared my feelings for peace.
Anyone who is better now
than when they started,
one to the clubs I belong to
and the ones I wanted to,
and maybe one to some of your friends.

This should be my last letter home,
to ask for love, world of freedom.
Can you say luck?
No, to you a soldier is a distant thing,
to me it's duty at all cost, people,
death, dogs, acid rain, diamonds in the rough.

Is this my last letter home?
You're damn right it is and you know it!
I've been hiding my feelings on paper,
writing between the lines of all my

poems, stories, plays, trying to reach only you.
Wanting you to say, I understand...
I know I understand you... really I do.

YOU'LL COME TO MY GRAVE STONE
WHERE I WILL FOREVER BE ALONE
HOLDING THIS LETTER BROUGHT FROM HOME
STILL THINKING IT'S ONLY ANOTHER POEM

BACK AT THE POST OFFICE IN LONDON

(January 2004)

Over the years, sitting,
sorting mail at the Post Office in London,
looking, at the postcards, dwelling,
on peoples lives and thoughts,
I see the same thing every day.
A single line stroked through
an address, "deceased",
written upon it by the letter carrier.

Five days before New Years,
seven million letters this Christmas,
thinking about him this season.
One letter out of how many?
One letter in an unknown hand.
One damn piece of paper, my hand
shaking, gasped breathing, never
a vision until now, one damn letter
in shaking penmanship written
beside the crossed out address . . .

my dad is dead.

LINKED SHORT STORIES

In the winter of 2003, after spending nearly everyday at the computer typing in my journals, I began a series of linked stories based on real events from the summer before I moved from Ontario, until I left Fredericton. They are, in a sense, stream of consciousness, slice of life prose as several occur at the same point in time. All are based on real people and real events and, except for the first story, all occur on the same day over a period of a few hours.

LEAVING LONDON

May 2nd 2002

Cloudy, grey, hot, rainy day. We ll see what happens. I continue to build the upstairs bedroom and fix up the backyard and garage. I had broken a hole in the ceiling at the entranceway of the house and cleaned out the old insulation, lowered the rafters to seven feet, laid a three-quarter inch plywood floor, walled in the chimney and wired the whole attic with electricity. It was now a two-story bungalow. I created a continuous airflow around the attic the next week when I put up the eighteen sheets of drywall and roof vents. It s amazing when you think that some men I know grew up with their fathers calling the contractor or plumber and never knew or learned how to use their hands or brains when it came to basic house repairs.

The garage was mostly completed last winter when London had all that warm snowless weather. The rafters were raised to seven feet, so I wouldn t bump my six-foot five-inch frame, and lined on the inside with twelve-inch planks and drywall scrounged from a local shoe store being renovated. Opaque glass windows replaced the front double doors and after the electricity was installed, on a sunny, warm ,winter day, I painted the garage canary yellow with a red and royal blue trim. You can t miss this little building as you drive up Clarence Street. Grey house, white house, white house, Bang! Canary yellow garage, white house, blue house. Last Sunday I finished the new patio deck and latticed in the bonsai garden I created at the back of the house up against the garage.

Today I decided to rest. To shower out the dust

and insulation, brave the inclement weather and venture downtown for a break. I went downtown along Dundas Street to get a bite to eat and made my way over to the new market on Talbot. While I was in the area, I went into the Jan Li Gallery and my friend Jan said she was upset by a customer who was still wandering in the back of the store. This young girl had been mumbling about the death of the city and crying and rocking back and forth. Jan asked me to get her out of the store in exchange for doing some framing I had just brought in. I had found some aluminum frames on Dundas Street and needed the glass to put in them.

I walked into the show room and there, standing in the back beside a mirror, was a young woman leaning forward with her head down, face partially covered with the olive-green poncho she was wearing. She raised her face and smiled as I approached her.

Hi. My name is Jessica White. What's yours? she asked quietly.

I'm Ryan, I said as I extended my hand and shook hers.

Do you know about the prophecies? Do you know about the Bible and God? she whispered.

Yes, yes I do, I replied. I know about the Robe and the Grail and the Life of Christ and many other related things. I really did, you know. I am an avid reader of world history, biographies and other real things in this world.

That building they are putting up across the street is an evil place. This new arena is an eyesore and shouldn't be there . . . it is an evil place, she repeated.

I don't want to be abused in this place. Jessica smiled up

at me and her tiny frame seemed to relax a bit as we (or she) talked.

Jessica didn't appear to be a street kid. She was not much younger than me and was certainly out of place in this nouveau riche art store; displaying nineteenth century art, modern bronzes, gilded mirrors and nude Roman statues. She continued to hold the hood of the poncho close to her neck as we talked. I suggested we should go for a coffee and we headed for Tim Hortons but ended up at the Greyhound Bus Station coffee shop. Jan smiled as we left and I threw her the thumbs up. Jessica and I walked to the bottom of Talbot Street and into the station. We talked for about an hour while she cried and ate a burger and was upset about a number of things.

Her father, whom she loved dearly, died a few months ago. I could see the despair in her eyes, like a hole had opened up in her heart unexpectedly and wouldn't close. Like the dull yellow color of this greasy-spoon restaurant, dulling the flavor of the food. Jessica spoke in a whispered voice.

God, I can't believe he's gone. It's been three months already and I still wake up and start crying, knowing he's not going to be there. Mom gave me his ring, she said weeping slightly, holding my hand for a moment. I wear it all the time. When I'm scared about something I look down at the ring on my finger and I start feeling better. I know even if I had one more day with him, it would never be enough. The worst part is that we had plans together. If only someone I knew were okay with dying, I might be okay.

I think I am ok with dying. I said. I lost my father five years ago on New Year's Eve and it took me

almost half a year to stop the heavy grieving. Now I just take a day here and there, once or twice a year to think about him and my two brothers.

Do you know how quickly this world expects people to get over the grief of their loved one? she sobbed.

I reached over and wiped the tears from her face with a clean napkin. She pulled back her hood to reveal a pretty but wet, oval-shaped face with short cropped brown hair. I had a dream at the end of that first six months after my dad died, I said, and in the dream I was standing in the living room of his old house in Woodstock and there was a huge hole in the floor. My dad was there. He threw a rope down into the darkness and began to climb into the hole. Be right back he said and disappeared. My eyes were beginning to fill up with tears. After that it was like a burden had been lifted from my shoulders. From my heart. I am ok with it now, I said.

I only wish I had his arms to hold my head as I cry on his shoulder. She spoke softly. I feel I have let him down. I haven't been what he wanted me to be . . . I feel like a failure.

She kept on talking. Mumbling sometimes and constantly rubbing her chest. Her father's death was not the only blow to her heart and health. Her two month old daughter had been taken away by Children's Aid three weeks ago and her nine year old son had rejected her as a parent and is a real brat. Four months earlier, her ex-boyfriend burnt her in the hotel room where they were

staying with a cigarette and now, she hadn't eaten in three days. And the list went on.

I brought her over to my house and made her a spaghetti supper. She took a long shower and when she said she was sore all over, I gave her a massage for about an hour. She was totally trusting and seemed to fall asleep for a bit.

Afterwards we walked uptown and along King Street to see a 9 p.m. movie. As we passed the Richmond Hotel, she almost demanded, let's go in there. She sat at the table in the low end bar and started shaking and mumbling and went into a bit of a trance. Jessica pulled her hood over her head and held it tight around her neck. I didn't know what to do or say. She then went into the washroom for about twenty minutes. This, I found out later, is the hotel where she was staying with the guy that burnt her. I left and walked home. She came over to the house two days later and apologized.

A month later my tenant, Barb Painter, was really uncomfortable with my helping Jessica. She has her own life. Comes and goes as she pleases and even though her and my new friend, Jessica, are close in age, Barb is like a little mother hen around the house, questioning everything I do. Barb is back to drinking all the time. The other day it was 31 degrees out and she had on shorts and a small top. She had her hair in pigtails and looked like a perky-breasted eighteen-year-old. I waved and said when she comes home this evening we would get married and winked at her. She thought my humor was disgusting. I went to sleep in the early afternoon and then off to work at the Post Office on midnight's. When I got to work, the

supervisor handed me a letter for full-time employment. I accepted it.

Two weeks later and full-time has been quite good. My back hurts a bit still but I am getting by. I preferred the five-hour part-time shift as it gave me time to do things during the day. Jessica called from Ottawa.

Hi, it's Jessica.

Hey, did you find your father's grave site?

No. My stupid bitch grandmother said I wasn't in the will but I was. I wandered around for two days in the stupid graveyard and couldn't find the stone. I was so depressed. I wanted to talk to him and now I can't.

Where's your Mother? Is she in Ottawa as well? I asked.

No, and I don't care where she is. I was robbed at the Sisters of Mercy and three girls assaulted me. I don't wanna stay here anymore. Can you give me some money to get home?

Sure, I said. I spend money on you to keep you safe but you keep running into the wrong people . . . I worry about you and want to keep you safe.

I know you do. I love what you are doing for me. Can you put some bus money in my account. You still have the number don't you?

Sure do, see you when you get in, I said dreading and wishing to see her again. When she arrived in London we went to a motel for the day. We took a shower. I saw no bruises as she had said. Her body was bruise and scratch free. I got dressed and bought some groceries for her. When I returned she was still in the shower and, as if I was never there in the first place, yelled at me to stay out and leave the food and she would call me later.

Towards the end of June, Barb Painter had been acting strangely, drunk every night and bitter about me helping Jessica. She was also upset about the hot water being off for two weeks. We had been having to boil water for baths. I had been paying the utilities on my own schedule of payments and not on theirs, which was pay it all or else. Now we were feeling the effects of the else. My best friend, Jack, came over one day and took Barb for a coffee. She told him that she thought I was having sex with Jessica, which wasn't true. Jessica came over last night and slept at my place. She asked me to massage her chest really hard as it was not feeling good. Like an itch you can't get rid of. She is also milking herself from the baby she lost to children's aid. Bad habit, I told her, especially in public. No wonder some jerk-off guy took it the wrong way, like she was just rubbing her small breasts for him. No wonder she was being sexually assaulted. But she doesn't get the connection and doesn't listen to my advice. Like at the Highbury mail sorting plant where my friend Brenda says no one listens to me anyway!

On Saturday I painted the entire living room and dining room. It is now changed from Burgundy to ice blue. Jessica moved out to stay at a female friend of hers. No gratitude, just want, want, want.

By the middle of July, I had planned to do renovations at my friend Christine English's place when Jessica called and was needing comfort and a friend and a place to stay. I canceled the renovations and we went to St. Joseph's Hospital for an appointment she had and then took the bus to Masonville Mall. She gradually became bossy and paranoid, thinking people were talking about her and us. We got ice cream cones and then went back

downtown. I got her a room at the Super 8 Motel and she said she would see me tomorrow. She got mad at me for picking up her luggage at the bus station and I did not hear from her again.

On Friday, I went to 8 East at the Victoria Hospital to see Jessica. She had phoned and said she was admitted there. Her doctor said she was found wandering the east end of London, mumbling and wrapped in a quilt. It was my old Hudson Bay car blanket I had loaned her but knew it would never be returned. She was suffering from heat stroke and dehydration. He said she was not taking her medications and they couldn't keep her any longer. I brought her a few things and she said she should get out on Saturday. I told her I would get her a place to stay. Again.

On the first day of August, Barb moved out. Left most everything. Jessica has been costing me about \$600 putting her up in motels to keep her safe. Jessica came by at 3am with her brother and drove to Ottawa. She had come over for two nights and then disappeared for three days after they released her from the hospital. Barb finally moved all her stuff out of the house and returned her key. I spent the morning cleaning the kitchen and the bathroom. What a mess!

Jessica came back after being away for two weeks and is sleeping in the back room. She showers again constantly. Some psychotic spells but not as bad. I came home after a weekend with my girlfriend and Jessica was so happy. She had wanted to do something nice for me for letting her stay at my place. She dragged me into the den and spread her arms wide and said with a huge smile on her face, Look what I did for you! She had arranged all

of the shelves in my library by book color! Every shelf was one color range with the reds and greens on one side and the yellows, blues and whites on the other rows of glass shelves. I just stood there dumfounded and didn't know whether to be happy or sad. I just smiled and gave her a hug. The next week I put my house up for sale so I could move to New Brunswick against everyone's wishes. I had accepted the job transfer to Fredericton and have been getting the house ready for rent.

It's nearing the end of August and Jessica has still been here. We got into a discussion about her money that she owes me, or at least promised to pay back. I asked her to leave last Wednesday evening and in the morning she was gone. She then came back at 1 or 2 in the morning and had a 45 minute shower.

The next day I painted the attic room, back room, and front hall. I went out for the night. Jessica came back late in the evening. She ate and took another long shower and left the bathroom door open. After 30-40 minutes I asked her to cut off the shower and about 10 minutes later asked her the same thing. When she said no, I went into the basement and shut off the water valve to the whole house.

Well! She went absolutely crazy! Jessica jumped naked out of the shower and came into the kitchen livid with anger. She hit me with her fist on the head and yelled and screamed that I wasn't her friend. That nothing I had done had ever helped her. She was raped and assaulted because of me. She hit me again. I was totally stunned by this behavior. I was also surprised by the strength in her tiny body. I picked her up and put her back in the bath room. I walked into the livingroom to call

the police when Jessica rushed out of the bathroom and hit me on the back and over the head with the plunger handle a couple of times. I fell to my knees, stunned by the hateful blow. The police were on the line and sending someone over. Then she went into the kitchen and grabbed a steak knife and came at me. I grabbed her wrist below the knife with my left hand and lifted her up in the air with my right arm. I swung her around in a circle five times and the brief dizziness disoriented her a bit. After this moment calmed her down I plopped her dripping wet body back into the tub of hot water. About a half hour later two female police officers came by and took her away. I found the knife on the tub ledge where the police officers hadn't noticed it. Guess they were lucky she had calmed down and not vented her anger at them!

September 2nd 2002

My 40th Birthday. I spent most of the weekend with my girlfriend and didn't tell her or anyone else about the recent attack at my house. I just needed to get away and relax. I spent most of my birthday cleaning and renovating for the tenants to move in. I stored all my extra stuff in the garage and tried to find my cat who had disappeared for a week with all the bad karma around the place. Tomorrow the cat and I are . . .

LEAVING LONDON

Standing on the shoulder of Highway 20, East of Montreal was a random act of kindness. I signaled, looked in my mirrors and pulled off the highway onto the shoulder of the road.

Two hours earlier I had thrown suitcase number five, my camera case, and a bag of laundry onto the front seat of my Corsica. The backseat held two more suitcases, pots and pans, clothes, and an empty cat cage. Just two days after my fortieth birthday, I figured I had another eight hours to drive to my new job in Fredericton New Brunswick, added to the six hours I had driven the day before. When the car came to a complete stop. I quickly shoved everything from the front seat into the back.

As the passenger's door opened I half expected a French accent as we were so close to Montreal. This hitchhiker was unlike anyone I had ever given a ride to. Here it was, a bright cloudless day on the road to nowhere and there standing along the highway was a man with only one leg and his crutches to balance himself while he thumbed for a ride. He was tall and thin and one would think a blast of wind from a passing transport truck would have blown him over. The first things to enter the car were his two crutches followed by one arm and a friendly hello as he swung himself into the passenger's seat. When he sat down, I noticed that not only was his left leg missing, his left hip was missing too. Hopefully for his sake, his middle leg was still intact.

Thanks, man . . . he smiled from under his black baseball cap and pony-tailed hair. His oval face tapered into a goatee . . . Thanks. I've been out here for over an

hour and no one stops to pick me up.

No problem, I said after he closed the door and I checked my mirrors and signaled, speeding along the shoulder to match the speed of the traffic before pulling onto the pavement. Where are you going? I asked, rolling up the window to decrease the noise level.

Heading home to New Brunswick. I just moved here two weeks ago from Edmonton. Me and some buddies drove over to Cornwall to go drinkin' for a few days. He put his head back against the seat. I could tell he was thinking about something or just very tired.

The name's Ryan, I said as the car moved into traffic and flowed along at twenty miles an hour over the speed limit. A few large rounded hills dotted the landscape on the right side of the highway. On the left, we followed the St. Lawrence River as it gradually widened the farther we traveled toward Quebec City until the turn-off for the Atlantic Provinces.

Mike, he said, extending his right hand to shake mine in a firm grip. You look like you are either movin' to or movin' away from some place? He glanced in the back seat and then looked at me.

Moving to. I said. Maybe in his mind there was a difference. I still own a house in London, Ontario that I have rented out. I'm moving down east for a year with my job, so in a sense, I'm not really moving away. Maybe I was just running away, I thought. I had burdened myself with so much in the past two years that I couldn't finish anything properly. Strangely though, it had only taken three weeks after accepting this new job to tie up loose ends, finish all the small projects, renovate and rent the house, pack and leave. I now realize I could have done all

that and kept my job, but there were other social and personal things I just couldn't deal with honestly, if I didn't take a break from them.

Not me, man, he responded almost immediately with a sense of accomplishment. Mike looked out the side window, then continued, I was so fed up with growing up and living in that nothing town of Edmonton. I took my last pay cheque, opened up a map of Canada, closed my eyes and pointed my finger to a spot on the map and left.

Where did you end up moving to? I asked as he fumbled with his cigarette package. I'll pull over in a while if you want to smoke outside the car, I said as we passed a transport truck climbing over a hill.

Well, I don't know, I think it's just inside the border. It begins with an I and ends with an N. I was working in a bar there for the last while. We should be in New Brunswick in a few hours, maybe I'll recognize a sign or somethin'.

You don't know where you live? I asked, bewildered. The traffic lightened up and we were the only vehicle on the highway for a long time. Well, what's the name of the bar you work at and where are the guys that you drove down with?

No, I don't recall the name of the town. And I don't know the name of the bar. He adjusted the crutches and leaned on his left elbow, staring forward into the Quebec countryside. He didn't seem too concerned, like he knew he would eventually find his way. I leaned forward and turned down the radio. It was just background noise anyway. We drove on in silence, except for the hum of the wheels, for almost an hour.

There s a truck stop ahead, I ll pull in and you can have a smoke. I can feel the transmission slipping anyway and I should check out the fluids.

Sounds like a plan, he said. I was dozing off but I kept feeling something was pulling at my throat, musta been the nicotine. I worked as mechanic in Edmonton and I felt a bit of a pull in the engine. You re probably just low on transmission fluid. We ll be ok for a couple of hours.

Farther along the road I slowed the car, signaled and pulled onto the exit lane for the rest stop. When we got there, Mike pulled himself out of the seat, leaned against the car and lit up. I grabbed the map from the glove compartment located between the two front seats, got out and placed it on the roof of the car. It was quite windy under the light blue sky. I showed him all the towns along the routes but he didn t recognize any of them. He took so long that I was beginning to think that he couldn t read them either.

Mike finished his cigarette and got back into the car. I was around the front checking the various fluids. The oil and antifreeze were ok but the trans fluid was low. I closed the hood, got back in my seat and threw the map in the back and we drove off.

I saw all t hree towns in New Brunswick that start with the letter I and end with the letter N . All of them are on the northeast part of the province. Near the city of Bathurst. Now there was a name I hadn t thought of in twenty years. One of my new projects was to find an old friend who lived there, that I had lost contact with when I was twenty-two. Does that name sound familiar? I asked.

No, not really , he sai d, me and m y buddies

drove for five hours and we went through Maine to get to Cornwall. Had to cross the border twice if I remember, in and out. His eyes squinted and he squeezed hi s lips together, Well , they ain t my buddies anymore. Screw em! he gesticulated, throwing the finger at the clear blue sky and the Quebec City sign. I told them when and where to pick me up and then they never showed. They must have gone back without me and my wallet with all my ID is still in their car. What am I gonna do when we get to the border?

There s no border between Quebec and New Brunswick. I said, We re going around Maine, not through it. Mike sat there for the longest time, thinking about it all. I guess, unless he was still a bit hung over. I had a lot to think about as well. I knew where I was going and where I was coming from. The day I left, a close friend said I h ope you find what you are looking for. I hadn t thought I had given her, or anyone for that matter, the impression that I was looking for something I didn t have or that I needed. Was I projecting that image and not realizing it? She was the only one who thought I should stay. Everyone else thought it was a great opportunity to travel, see another part of the country and get paid three thousand dollars a month at the same time.

I hadn t planned on traveling alone either. After cleaning up around the house and storing most of my stuff in the garage I had painted primary red, canary yellow and blue last January, I spent a frustrating hour and a half trying to get my cat, Leviathan, into the car to put him in the cage. Twice I caught him and twice he scratched me and got loose before I could get him to the car. He must have sensed something was changing in his

life and the house we lived in. He was not his usual docile eight-year-old self.

I need another smoke, Mike said as we neared Riviere de Loop, where we would be making our turn and leaving Quebec. I've been trying to think of the name of that town but I can't. I gotta take a piss, too. As the St. Lawrence widened to its greatest width and small islands began to appear in the middle of the river, we pulled off the road, under a bridge for a short break. Mike used the passengers' door as a shield against the wind and the traffic while he relieved himself and then had a smoke. Well, that shot down my image of a double amputation!

Mike and I spent the next hour or so on the road in silence or listening to the radio (when we could get an English-speaking station), pointing out the change in scenery from Quebec to New Brunswick.

You got a family, Ryan? he said, adjusting his one leg and turning slightly to look at me as he spoke.

A couple of brothers and a sister. I answered, turning down the radio again and rolling my window up against the continued noise of the wind.

I'm the middle child of fifteen kids, he said, all of us were born in late summer or early Fall. The last time I talked to any of them was about two years ago. I went over to shoot the shit with my younger sister and we got in a big fight after we went to the bar for a beer.

Where's the rest of your family?

Oh God, they're all over Alberta and three older brothers in Toronto and Ottawa and another sister and her family in Woodstock. That's close to London, ain't it?

Yes, it's about thirty miles from London. I grew up there. Does anyone in your family know that you

moved out here?

Nope, came his firm reply. The fields began to disappear and the tree growth became thicker as we traveled farther east.

Did you bring anything with you when you came out to the town you can't remember?

Some clothes, a stereo and stuff I picked up along the way. We just drove past the Welcome To New Brunswick sign and the nearest city was Edmundston. There's the border, he said. So let me get this straight, I said, looking in the mirrors and seeing no traffic in front or behind us. The vapor trail of an airplane above, cut across the sky headed East. You came out here with next to nothing. You didn't tell anyone where you were going and you don't recall the name of the town you've been living in for the past two weeks? You managed to get a job but you don't know the name of it, either and these so-called friends have your wallet with all your ID, in their car?

Yep, and I don't care about the stuff in my room.

Do you have any money in the bank or even a bank account for that matter? I asked.

Yea, actually, I get a disability cheque deposited at around 9pm tonight, at the Royal Bank.

It's 4pm. We're almost at the next town. Why don't I drop you off there. You can go to the bank in the morning and the teller should be able to track down your account and the town you were living in. Or, maybe it's the hand of God reaching down and telling you to stop running away from the life you had and go home. Mike just looked over at me and nodded his head. He agreed that I should let him off in the next town. He needed

another smoke, a bite to eat and a place to sleep for the night.

Three quarters of an hour later I signaled for the second turnoff to Edmundston New Brunswick. We made our way to the center of town and I dropped him off in front of the Salvation Army Emergency Shelter. As he pulled himself out of the car and adjusted his shirt and crutches, I handed him a couple of twenty s which he refused out of some sense of pride, turned and headed across the sidewalk to the Shelter.

I don t think he caught the similarity between his hometown and this one. I drove back onto the highway and in two hours I would pass through the city of Woodstock on the way to my new home.

SURPRISED BY JOY

Brinda boarded the 3pm Boeing bound for Ireland, slightly exhausted from her two-hour car ride. Fortunately, the 401 hadn't been busy. There were the usual road hogs and slow pokes, transport trucks and long stretches of silence, broken by the sounds of Leonard Cohen emanating from the CD player. The weather had been in her favor this September day. The sky was blue and temperatures were in the high 60s (for those of you who haven't yet adjusted to Centigrade). The Fall Mums were blooming early at the bottom of the stairs as she left in the car for the trip. Her eldest son had bought the house for her from a small lottery win a few months previous. Inside her car was a lot of pot pourri, along with carved stones, marbles and her miniature teddy bear ornaments scattered here and there.

Brinda parked her car at the large parking garage at the Toronto International Airport, picked up the small suitcase and took the Airport Bus to the terminal. Within a few minutes she walked through the security doors and emptied all the metal objects from her pockets into the green plastic container provided and placed her coat and bag on the security machine. She stood patiently as the security guard (who had a huge gap in his teeth, she noticed) scanned her with his metal detector. The gentleman in front of her had to go through the metal detector twice. The second time he had to take off his steel-toed construction boots which had set off the alarm. One of the guards placed her bag on his boots as they went through the x-ray scanner. It was not the cleanest thing she had seen and thought at least her jacket wasn't

coming in contact with them. When the ordeal was over, she boarded the plane and looked for her seat. Row upon row of identical blue chairs with a darker triangle-shaped headrest stretched out before her. She had hoped for a window seat, but had to settle for the aisle seat across from the bathroom. She opened some pot pourri to give the air a more pleasant scent. Brinda stuffed her jacket and carry-on bag into the overhead compartment, closed the door and sat down by the window anyway.

Thirty years she said aloud to no one in particular. She had received a letter from an old friend she hadn't seen or heard from since she was twenty years old. Brinda pulled the letter out of her purse and read it again. She looked at the handwriting, probing the memories of her brain as she ran her fingers along the edge.

It's hard to believe that I've been in love with you for thirty years. Although, I've never written you a love song, never phoned in the last decade but once, only written twice. But I dream. You have been the main character in my stories, told late at night to typewriter keys. You will be nineteen, forever. When I was twenty-one and you were almost nineteen, I dreamt I swam the lake to your cabin, carried you naked to the beach, kissed your lips, caressed your skin and having never known love, I dreamt.

When I was twenty seven and you were still eighteen, I had a family of my own, but each and every summer I would get away, and drive to the lake where your spirit walked the shoreline of my mind and having never known your love, I dreamt. Next summer, I'll be fifty-one and you will turn nineteen. I will leave a

photo of myself on your dock at the beach and if you look closely, you will see me floating just beneath the surface unless I can be with you once again. Please come and see me while mid-life is still winking in our eyes.

A lot had happened since those crazy days of our youth, she thought. It's a wonder any of those friends are alive, let alone able to remember each other after all these years. An airplane ticket had been enclosed in the letter and stipulated that she be with him in early September in Dublin Ireland. She would be met at the airport. The power of the World Wide Web was beyond her grasp, but her friend, Scott McRae, had found her with a search of her maiden name. Luckily she had kept her maiden name through all three of her marriages and subsequent divorces. Brinda wrote back and said she would come for the second week of September.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please fasten your seat belts and place your chair in the upright position," broadcast the memorized speech from the stewardess. "Welcome to Flight 198 nonstop from Toronto to Dublin. We will be cruising at an altitude of 38,000 feet, and our travel time will be six hours and fifty-six minutes. In two hours we will be providing meals. After we reach cruising altitude you may order alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. At that time, your captain will turn off the fasten seatbelt light - and you may move freely about the aircraft."

"Thank God," she said to herself. That was what was missing from her trip. She neglected to stop at "Robin's" for a cup of tea on the way out of town and couldn't wait for the meal cart. The jet taxied down the

runway and waited in line for its turn to cast off into the sky. The tarmac was as crowded as the highway going through Toronto. An airplane landed or took off from the airport every minute of the day. The low rumble from the engines was initially irritating as the plane took off from the asphalt. There was a slow turn at the end of the runway and then a high speed taxi and liftoff that pushed one back into the seat. It settled quickly into a climb to 38,000 feet where it leveled off near the end of Lake Ontario.

What was she doing this for anyway? A phone call would normally suffice to bring two friends together, or letters sent by post. Her life was stable enough, teenagers at home and friends coming by to socialize on a weekly basis. She owned her own home with its normal wealth of bills, repairs, etc. She worked, acted, and taught at the local college. She was certainly busy enough. Why did she have to go across the ocean to see an old friend? Well, she was doing it and that was all that mattered right now. What was a week out of one's life anyway? She asked her girlfriend to look after the birds and water the plants that crowded the sunroom of her new house while she was gone.

She wanted to leave her car in the driveway and had asked her friend Tim to drive her to the airport but he said he would be out of town too. Tim. Well there was a friend, always with the flowers and the free tickets to the theater, dinners and other things. She had confided in him for years. She told him her troubles and fears as well as the good times and the excitements that made up her busy life. He recently expressed his love for her but she just wanted to be friends. He was quiet but wrote her notes of

news and endearments every day. At 8:15 am sharp, the mail would birth itself through the mailbox opening and there would be a card lying on the hardwood floor. She was dating someone else but she and Tim would be best of friends no matter what.

The seatbelt light went off and Brinda unleashed the strap. She shifted her body in the seat and looked out the window at the land quickly passing from Ontario, across Quebec and turning East over the Atlantic Provinces where her grandparents had lived. From the air, she was impressed by the geography of the farmland flowing beneath the plane. The lack of it in some areas and the amount of it in others. The abundance of lakes amid the trees and the signs of small towns and villages. Long, long stretches of Trans Canada Highway ribboned across the greenscape and into the distance. Wafts and clumps of clouds so close she wanted to reach out and touch them. So many lives down there on the good earth. Farm after farm and all the same, yet all different. A single car moves East along the highway empty of other vehicles and she wonders about the lonely traveler. Does he ever look up and see a plane in the sky?

The stewardess came down the aisle with the drink cart. She looked over at Brinda and smiled, "Hi, my name is Liz, would you like a glass of wine before we take orders for the meals? The voice brought her back into the confines of the plane.

"Sure, Liz, that would be nice. I would appreciate a nice glass of wine right about now, as long as it's Canadian."

Brinda lowered the small table that was connected to the chair in front of her. Liz set the glass of wine on the

tabletop and continued down the aisle serving customers. Twenty minutes later she returned to the back of the plane.

"I hope you don't mind if I sit here for a minute," she said, "I am off for two weeks vacation and even though I fly everywhere, I haven't been off the plane in months," Liz sighed and closed her eyes for a second. "I just need to rest for a minute."

"No, you go right ahead," Brinda replied, sipping slowly on the elixir of life. "Good wine in a plastic cup," she thought to herself. "Well it's free and it's cold." This young girl reminded Brinda of her own daughter in a few ways; out in the world, traveling alone, and probably hadn't phoned her mother in a long while. She let her rest and chose not to talk to her just now. Wine wove its way through her brain and her body, and with the humming of the engines at a much more pleasant resonance now, the deep blue ocean below calmed whatever fears she may have had about flying. Brinda pulled her journal out of her purse and by the time she looked over, Liz had gone. She saw her and two other stewards down the aisle taking food orders. Hunger set in and she waited for the cart and ate heartily when it was her turn to be served.

After the meal and a cup of hot lemon tea, Brinda settled back into the noisy consciousness of this trip. Voices mingling and the roar of the engine mixed with her anticipation, thoughts and emotions about meeting her old friend. She had not felt this way in a long time. This space was of her own choosing. The last time she felt like this was at Christmas when she danced with her current companion. That was when they met. The air was clearer and the music sounded better, she had told him, after

their first date. He watched her dance with her girlfriends for the first half hour or so before asking her to dance. They fell into a rhythm that had them wishing they had known each other for years. Over Christmas through well past Valentine's Day, he had showered her with the most wonderful poetry. Flowers poured forth from his brain.

Brinda stared out the window again. They were long past New Brunswick and well out over the Atlantic Ocean. Closer to Europe, she daydreamed into the deep blue, cloudless sky until she eventually saw Ireland from the sky. The jet began its descent into Irish airspace and the seatbelt sign came on. Liz resumed her position about halfway down the aisle and went through the landing procedures as the ground rose up to greet the wheels. The wing flaps went into their upright position as the air braking began and the plane touched down on the tarmac. The doors opened and the passengers proceeded to customs and then on to claim their baggage. The smell of the ocean crept across the land.

Brinda gathered up her belongings and retrieved her carry on luggage from the compartment above her seat. She said goodbye to Liz as she walked out the door and into the airport. Security was a little more complicated than in Toronto but within about 30 minutes she had her luggage and was headed for the lobby. When she stepped through to the passenger pickup area she stopped, stood up straight and dropped her luggage on the floor. She was not amused.

There stood Tim, wearing a big smile, his best suit and carrying a large bouquet of red roses and a ring box which he had just pulled out of his pocket. He had been on the front of the plane, rushed off first so he would be

there when she got off to express his love for her. He had planned this romantic week to spend with the woman he loved. Tim had previously e-mailed a colleague working in Dublin to pose as Brinda's "old friend" inviting her to Ireland and sending him the money for the airline tickets, in hopes they would spend a wonderful week in Dublin.

Brinda was a smart woman, and as beautiful on the inside as she was on the outside. But right now she was livid. It took her less than a minute to figure out most of what was going on. Her 5'6" frame seemed to expand two or three inches and she was literally hissing at him. Hissss . . hissss . . missss . . miss, Miss? Liz stood over her.

"Miss, the plane has landed and we are unloading. Wake up Miss." Liz shook Brinda's shoulder and gave her a glass of water. "You slept through the landing. Are you OK?"

Brinda looked around and gathered her senses, smiled up at Liz, drank the water and gave her back the glass. She began to put on her jacket.

"Yes, thanks. It must have been the altitude and the wine. I guess I was more tired than I thought. I had the strangest dream about coming here to see my friend," she said. She looked down at her journal where she had only written three words and the ink had run off the edge of the page. Brinda stood up, retrieved her bags and headed to the front of the plane. When she entered the airport she recognized Scott and was surprised by joy.

PLASTER ROCK

Peter had been driving his Ford pick-up truck from Plaster Rock to Perth-Andover and was about thirteen miles from the Trans Canada Highway when he noticed the engine warning light. The tarp that covered the bed of the pick-up was starting to flap in the wind at the back where the yellow nylon cord had become undone. A bead of sweat appeared on his forehead as he began to wonder if anyone could peer inside as they passed him on the highway from a truck or a bus.

His hand came off the steering wheel, flicked a cigarette into the half-empty ashtray. He began looking for a place to pull off the road and check the engine. Peter had most of the tools that he needed in the silver tool box in the back of the truck. He could fix most anything. He wasn't too worried about the engine. It was an old truck. His heart was beating faster about other things that made up his twenty-six year old life. Mostly a life of taking dares and this was the boldest dare he had ever attempted.

The winding two lane highway passed by the dense forest of Spruce, Pine, and Aspen. Every two miles a rough-cut road emerged from the New Brunswick forest. These were the logging roads which gave the lumber companies access to their extensive land holdings. Smaller sawmills and dry kilns dotted the highway. Peter's pickup truck had left one of these roads about twenty minutes earlier, raising a cloud of September dust on the main highway as he shifted gears, glanced uneasily in the mirrors and sped along the highway.

The flapping of the tarp began to worry him as a

second cord became undone. When he took his eyes off the image in the rear-view mirror, he noticed a sign for a gas station up the road. He adjusted his baseball cap and lit another cigarette and crushed the first one on the dirty cab floor with his left foot. The place he pulled into appeared to have been vacant for a few years. The windows were boarded up and the gas pumps had been removed. The outline of the Irving name could be seen faintly against the building. The surface had been painted white and was modernized with a smattering of graffiti. Peter pulled the pick-up onto the far side of the building and tied the tarp tight. He then went around to the front and popped the hood.

The engine was low on oil and after he had poured in a couple of quarts of Quaker State a hand reached out and touched him on the shoulder. Peter's heart stopped and his body went tense. His face turned white as a sheet. Instinctively defensive, Peter swung around and with a clenched fist, sucker punched the old man square in the forehead and sent him back against the wall. He slammed the hood shut and jumped in the front seat spitting stones against the old gas sign as he raced onto the highway. Looking back into the rear-view mirror, he saw no one on the highway behind him and there was no car parked at the gas station either. His heart wouldn't stop pounding.

This was one of the dares he had hoped would come along and he had pulled it off with little difficulty. The outcome outweighed the investment at least a hundred times. He had planned it for about three days. He was looking at the mirror on the left side of the truck

as traffic passed in the other direction and he was looking for vehicles that were coming up behind him. The sun was low as it began the long path to set for the day but the light was not in his eyes yet. He went to reach for his sunglasses on the dash and a hand reached out and touched him on the arm.

Why did you do that to me? came the voice of the old man in the passenger's seat.

Gezzus Christ! screamed Peter, as he slammed on the brakes and came to a stop on the concrete bridge of the upper St. John River. His heart leapt into his throat and his fingers turned white as he gripped the steering wheel. The old man that Peter saw now was the same one from the gas station. He didn't believe in apparitions, and not sure he was seeing one now as the man bounced off the dash of the pickup. The vehicle came to a screeching halt. Ghosts or whatever, he thought quickly, wouldn't do that, would they?

Peter, in his dazed and paranoid frightened state, ran around to the other side of the truck. He opened the passenger door and threw the man over the bridge and into the river below. He stood there trying to catch his breath and calm his heart and nerves. He looked around to see if there were any cars on the road. There was one off in the distance. It was too far away to have seen anything that had happened a few minutes ago. When he got back into the pickup and tried to start the engine, it flooded and thumped to a full stop. By now he was really scared, both from the theft and the ghost, or whatever it was, that he began to run down the road. He got about a hundred feet from the bridge when he heard the voice of the old man calling his name. He turned and held his

hands up in front of him as the old man walked in his direction along the side of the road. By this time Peter's hair had turned white from fright and he began walking backwards away from the apparition.

Ryan Acker had been driving on the highway for about two hours after leaving Edmundston when he noticed a fleet of police cruisers along the highway and down one of the dirt roads he had seen, leading into the forest. Several miles further along a westbound Montreal/Ottawa Express bus swept by and then he noticed a blue pickup truck that had been parked on the bridge overlooking a river.

He looked back to see if anyone was around but didn't see anybody. Just as he turned his head to the front and looked up the road, there was a young man walking backwards and waving. No more hitchhikers today, buddy, he said to himself as he waved back and kept on going in the direction of Woodstock and then on to Fredericton to start his new job. He figured a couple of more hours on the road and he should be there by 7:30pm.

KAREN

part 1 Kelly

The cool, blue sky air fought for space inside Karen's "Export A" lungs as she leaned against the wall, pulled the cigarette from her lips and headed downtown. The working world wouldn't see her for a couple of days. Granite wall, coal-black coat, amethyst sky, ruby red hair. The beauty of this scene is one that should be captured in a photograph and displayed on a wall at the Beaverbrook

Gallery for all to see. Well, at least from an observer's point of view. Karen's green eyes saw this photograph, this moment in time, from a different perspective. From her eyes she saw the wind blow leaves and papers down the alley that lead away from the University Library, a shadowed alley that only shortened her walk downtown by a few minutes.

A weak smile came across her face as she thought about her Persian cat, Kafka, hanging halfway out the window of her apartment on Westmorland. He had lunged through the screen after a squirrel or bird or something this morning before she had left for work. Kafka was wedged in the hole he had created. It was his crying that had woken her up on this September day. She thought about leaving him there, dangling, but changed her mind.

Karen continued to walk down University to the center of town. Cars rushed by and strangers and acquaintances greeted her along the way. She picked up the things she needed for the costume party she was organizing for this evening. A small Atlantic Lottery win had tugged at her wild side. She walked the four blocks to Regent Street and was loaded down with potato chips from the Corner Store, balloons, black candles and streamers from the Dollar Discount, and more. The last things on her list of things to get were some beer and wine from the liquor store near Smythe and King.

The power of nicotine withdrawal grabbed at her nerves and luckily she was near her car. It was parked on the far side of the George Street Market parking lot. It had stalled yesterday so she left it there and had to walk home then and to work this morning. Karen threw what she had

bought into the trunk of her red Saturn, pulled the cigarette pack out of her pocket and lit up. Eyes closed, she pulled the hot chemical-filled air into her lungs, oblivious to the noise of trucks, cranes and construction workers banging away on a new building in the distance. When she opened her eyes, the first thing she thought of was the last thing on her party shopping list, BOOZE!

The Beer Store was across town and seemed even farther now with her car out of commission. She pulled the cell phone out of her pocket and called her taxi driver friend Duncan to fix it for her. She reminded herself that she had to hurry. She still had to drop off all the stuff in her trunk at the space she rented at Gallery Connexion, go home and change into her Roller Girl costume and drive across town to pick up her best friend Sarah, and get to her party by 7pm.

Karen walked South on Regent and proceeded to cross Brunswick Street and pass in front of the bus station when she noticed a girlfriend sitting inside. She walked over to the door.

"Kelly, what are you doing here? Where are you going?" she asked as she entered the room and walked over to where her friend sat.

"Karen! I'm so sorry. I guess you didn't get my phone message, Kelly blurted out. Something happened to me that was beyond my control." The 23-year-old brunette paused . . . took Karen's hand in hers and puppy dog eyes filled with tears . . . "I found my Mother! she finally said. "I was three year s old when she just got up one day and left us. My dad was devastated and all I had was a memory."

"Oh Kelly, I'm so sorry. I didn't know. I guess the woman I thought was your mom all these years, must have been your step mom?"

"Yea," Kelly whispered, "but then I found her. It was so simple. Three weeks ago my boyfriend got a new computer and high speed Internet access." Her voice began to raise. She was smiling and back to her normal semi-annoying fast-speech self. "It was a new world to me. I must have been living in the attic all this time. I was surfing around using Google and discovered Four11.ca, the Internet telephone book. I typed in my Mom's maiden name and . . . Poof! . . . there it was! She's only hours away in Montreal and to top it all off, she has e-mail. I wrote to her a couple of days ago and asked her to meet me tonight."

Usually, Kelly's nonstop yammering went in one ear and out the other but Karen's eyes were glued to her lips. Not even nicotine fits nor the party could pull her away from the never-ending story. Karen would hear more about it when her friend returned. The bus station was small, as was the town of Fredericton, and not too crowded. Everyone began to gather around the two girls and there wasn't a dry eye in the crowd when Kelly finished talking. She also told Karen that her brother would be the disc-jockey at the party tonight instead of her, just as the Montreal-Ottawa Express pulled into the station.

Karen gave Kelly a big hug and watched as her Oromocto High School friend boarded the bus, and headed up to the top of the hill at Prospect and onto the Trans Canada Highway towards Woodstock, Edmundston and then on to Montreal. Karen went by taxi

to the beer store after the bus pulled away. The six-block walk along King and back would have been too exhausting with all the booze she had to buy. Returning to her red Saturn, she found her friend Duncan there and the car purring like a kitten. Karen gave him a big hug, pressing her breasts firmly against his stomach. Duncan hopped in the taxi she had arrived in and left. The time for his second job was coming up and he had to get cleaned up and changed for afternoon shift at the Post Office on Wagonners Lane. She drove east to pick up Sarah.

KAREN

Part 2 Sarah

The cat was curled up in a brown gray ball on the chesterfield moments after her owner's bruised body had left. The bruises made no impression on the couch. They were on the inside. Too many times in too many years the heat of the room had bothered her, preferring the comfort of the cold. The cat would argue that point. Sarah got up and walked slowly over to the blue-framed window, opened it to let in the September air. The 30-year-old, pale-skinned woman stared out the pane as the cat slept. The cold air poured over her torn fingernails and ring-free left hand to the floor and brushed against her legs.

The doorbell rang on the North Side bungalow as the evening wind swirled leaves around in the driveway. Moving away from the window, Sarah threw the blond shoulder-length wig over her black hair and sweater, glanced at the cat and opened the door.

"Well, it took ya long enough to come to the door!"

"Sorry," Sarah said, "I should have waited outside for you, but with this costume . . ."

"Come on," her friend said in a squeaky voice, roller skating around on the front porch in her 'Boogie Nights' costume, "We're gonna be late for my party. I bought all the goodies and just dropped them off at Gallery Connexion."

Sarah locked the door on her way out and didn't even look back to see if anyone noticed she was leaving. Her (in)significant other didn't seem to care what she did or where she went. This was just a false freedom. The furnace kicked in and warmed up the cat to a comfortable centigrade. The cat was too young to remember Fahrenheit.

Early fall had always been a good time for Sarah. A place to hide as a child when some of the bruises and scars were on the outside. The cold evening air around her was an early comfort that stayed with her into her thirties. This was the first party she had gone to in years, and her new job had forced her to come in contact with more than she could handle at his point in her life. Most of the time she did solitary things, her painting, stained glass, and her poetry. Sarah's newest and best friend at the University Library was ten years younger and full of 'piss & vinegar' with a nonstop social life.

"You look like a 5-foot Andy Warhol," Karen squeaked, rolling from the porch to the car. "Get in or we'll be late." The red Saturn pulled out of Marysville and headed towards Union Street and then downtown across the Westmorland Street Bridge and the wide St. John River.

"How can you drive this car with the roller skates on?" Sarah questioned her friend as they drove down the darkening tree-lined streets. Karen swung her head from side to side. The waist-length wig slapped Sarah in the face. "Hey . . . you think I got big feet? I'm only five feet tall with the skates on! It's easy." Ten minutes later they arrived at the parking lot off Queens where the costume party was just starting. Before they got out of the car, three vampires, two cross-dressers, five devils, Elvis and a police officer walked into the building.

Sarah thought about the cat. She thought about the cool air coming in the window and how much nicer it would be than the noisy, hot dance hall. Karen smiled at the 'little Andy Warhol' and said, "Well, let's go inside and party!" Karen locked the Saturn and lit up a cigarette before going in.

They made their way across the parking lot and down the small incline to the front door. Karen skated to the bar, grabbed a beer and did circles around the dance floor in her bright green short-shorts, gyrating to the heavy metal music and the stares of 25 of her closest friends milling about and drinking. Sarah walked into the room and glanced over at the older man, dressed in the police uniform and was sitting alone in an area to her right. All her bruises disappeared.

KAREN

Part 3 Allan

"Ok, I'll be downstairs in twenty minutes," he said out loud to himself and maybe the cat. Buster sat on the green tiles of the kitchen floor licking his paws and scratching a few fleas, not really listening to anything.

Allan rolled off the futon bed and planted his tired feet firmly on the blue carpet of his second-floor apartment. The September sun was creeping in the wedged-open window along with the cool morning air. It had been a few years since he had gotten up this early and certainly not to go and help an old friend with his new landscaping business. After a quick shower and a shave, he slipped his work clothes on over his six-foot frame and crammed his feet into the size 14 steel-toed boots. Allan had been helping Kevin Best clean up the grounds of several townhouse complexes and the contract ended today. He really enjoyed the gardening aspect of the work, but being a Ministry of Housing project for the unemployed, immigrants, and Wal-Mart shoppers, most of the work time was spent picking up the garbage with little time spent cutting grass.

Knock! Knock! Knock! on the door of his apartment had Allan lacing up his boots and heading down the stairs. Kevin was half way to his gray-dusty crew-cab when Allan locked the door behind him. If he had looked up as he walked away, he would have seen the cat scratching at the window, wanting out.

"There's your usual coffee." Kevin smiled his tight-lipped, bearded grin as they drove off.

"And I suppose you're still drinking warm milk, are

you?" he said, after picking up the 'Tim's' cup and tapping the large, triple cream triple sugar cup of Kevin's. "Which one are we finishing up today?"

"Thought we'd clean up Copperthwaite Street. Sean and I finished off North Side Road over the past two days . . . oh, I bought two dump trucks yesterday and I need ya to help me with them this afternoon." Kevin turned the truck onto Main Street and headed West.

"Well, sure, buddy, but not too long. Don't forget I told you about this Halloween party I gotta go to at six or seven." The traffic was light for the so-called 'rush hour' as they turned onto Waggoners Lane and into the housing complex and then next door to the Post Office complex where his sister Rose worked.

Yea, Ok. It won't be much work for a strong guy like you. I have a Newfie mechanic over there now pulling the two trucks apart so I can put the best of both on one truck. We'll be lifting the cabs off and exchanging them." Kevin said as he parked the truck, got out and grabbed the rakes from the back of the pick-up. "Garbage bags are behind the seat."

The morning went fast enough for the two men. They had worked together about six years earlier for a local property maintenance company where Allan was the foreman and Kevin was his crew Leader. After four years they had gone their separate ways. They kept in touch sporadically and now that Kevin had started his own landscaping company, he had wanted his old friend to work for him on a regular basis. Kevin was only a couple of inches over five feet tall and closer to the garbage. Allan spent most of the morning having to stop and stretch in between the stoop and bending to clean up the

grounds.

Allan's mind was not on the job at hand but on this party that he was going to tonight. Even though he was tired, he would still be there. He had been spending a great deal of time in the York Library and the UNB Library doing a research project for his sister. He was in the library regularly and had made friends with a cute, little, redheaded librarian around his age named Karen. She had just won some money in the new Atlantic Lottery and was throwing a costume party for her friends and had slipped him an invitation note one day a couple of weeks ago. Karen was covered in freckles. He often wondered just how far down those freckles continued and he intended to find out! He was in using the computer to surf the Web when a familiar voice yelled out . . . "Last bag! Quitting time!"

Allan snapped his day-dreaming head back to see Kevin waving at him from across the complex. He headed for the truck and Allan followed behind him, a garbage bag over his shoulder and rake dragging along behind him. Thirty-one bags packed tightly into the back of the one-ton and they drove off to the town dump. Then it was off to the farm to work on the trucks. Lifting the 300 pound cabs off and exchanging them was the easy part, but it had taken them the better part of the afternoon to unbolt every wire and bracket, housing and pin, that held them together.

He arrived home exhausted, let the cat out, showered, shaved and changed into the costume he had rented for the evening, got in his car and left. He figured a couple of more minutes on the road and he should be there by 7:30pm.

Review of Going Down Goose Lane Toward Broken

Jaw: Fredericton poems and stories, by Wayne Ray
(London Ontario, Harmonia Press, 2005) 102 pp. \$15
ISBN 0-9688885-9-3 by Anne Burke

Prairie Journal of Canadian Literature

This collection is dedicated to Ray's workmates at 203 Waggoners Lane (Fredericton New Brunswick). Ray writes in the tradition of Jack Kerouac's "On The Road; fuelled by Joe Blade's "Vagabondia". (Blades was once a neighbor, hence the allusion to his "Broken Jaw" Imprint.) The allusion to "goose lane" places the locus for these poems [and stories] squarely in Fredericton, New Brunswick. (Think "Goose Lane Editions")

In "Back at The Post Office in London", Ray uses the binary of macrocosm and the microcosm to great effect. In the macrocosm, by trade he is sorting the mail, when he comes across correspondence marked "deceased". In the microcosm, in this particular instance, it signifies the death of his own father and evolves into his grief, how he was notified when his letter was returned.

There is a noble tradition of poet bards at the Post Office, gainfully employed as civil servants, while composing poetry. Witness Archibald Lampman and the Nineteenth Century Confederation Poets in Ottawa. Ray contributes his unique perspective. According to David Fraser, who offers a preface self-styled as a "review", Ray captures the poet "as voyeurs, the lonely hunting of the heart." Ray decided to include poems written to him "by friends and lovers I met along the way." We learn this from the author's comments on the poems, arranged chronologically, which he wrote when he was transferred from London Ontario to Fredericton. Fortunately, he

fashioned "work" poems not only about the occupation but about graffiti ("Banting Building U of T"), protest ("George! Poets For Peace," and the Community Health Clinic "Room Mates: Samantha and Jen S."). The metaphor for "Chess Board of Life" (Wayne is moving in 5 Days") also appears in "Queen's Pawn 2". Then "Romeo & Juliet: Prick of the Dagger" is an ode to "Sam's Knife Collection." He seems preoccupied with time (dates of composition are marked by day, month and year) and place, with friends, (Breakfast at Cora's"), at the tavern ("Whippitt Lounge"), and in the poem "In a Dream".

The poem "You Cannot Give a Heart That Has Been Taken" is a collaborative poem composed online. He describes the characters by whether or not they have access to the World Wide Web. This certainly is an interesting analogy, given that he works at a Canada Post plant; he still found time to use the Internet, a competitor, if not enemy, to the mail carrier.

Despite the author's comments on his series of "Linked Short Stories", these are sketches or anecdotes (the unelaborated narration of a single event). He recognizes the artifice of events happening at the same time (since all occur on the same day over a period of a few hours). The sketches are arranged in roughly chronological order, using first-person narration in the first sketch and third-person in the others.

The sequence "Leaving London is used twice, for the linked series and for the second short story. In "May 2nd 2002" the protagonist, a male, forty years of age, introduces the reader to the picaresque of "low" characters. The picaresque means: of or relating to rogues or rascals and being a type of fiction dealing with the

episodic adventures of a roguish protagonist. The settings are: Social Services, renovated low-income housing, sexual assault, and mental illness. What or who is it that links the slice-of-life "real stories", but the narrator. "I am an avid reader of world history, biographies, and other real things in this world" (p.61)

In the second (story), "Leaving London" Ryan has a cat Leviathan; he picks up a hitchhiker Mike, who cannot recall the name of the town he just left [or lived in]. Being a Good Samaritan Ryan drops him off at the Salvation Army Shelter [of the next town].

In the third, "Surprised by Joy", Brinda, on her way to Ireland, must pass airport security at Toronto International Airport. Once on board a Boeing, she reads a love letter. Instead of having a reunion with a former boyfriend, she arrives in Dublin to learn that Tim, a current flame, has played a practical joke on her [and is waiting for her].

In the fourth, "Plaster Rock", Peter is driving a Ford pick-up, which breaks down. He takes the opportunity to "sucker punch" an elderly man, who later appears as a ghost. Ryan encounters the same truck but refuses to pick up Peter, hitchhiking.

In the fifth, "Karen Part 1: Kelly", Karen is shopping for a party, when she learns that Kelly has found her [birth] mother by using the Internet. Duncan shares a cab for his shift at the post office. In "Part 2: Sarah", Sarah is one of the party guests. In "Part 3: Allan, Kevin and Allen work at a farm. There is a cat named Kafka.

In the sixth, "The Newfie", John immigrates from Newfoundland to Fredericton. The joke is on him and the readers:

"Then it happened. That one insight that changes a man's life, opens the synapses in the brain allowing the fingers of reality to seep into the empty spaces like a good shelf reading at the local library . . ."

I will not reveal the mock heroic ending, you will have to buy the book.

His haiku were translated into Japanese and published by Mercutio Press in 2003., under the title "In A Dream". Ray is strong on portraying aspects of character, with stream of consciousness and plotlessness by design. However, the "poetry of the People" (of which Milton Acorn was fond [and for whom, Ray published his last book "The Whiskey Jack" the year he died]), offers a kinder venue for his talents than the challenge of fiction. Perhaps the term "prose" poems might be more accurate, unless the material can prove to be the makings of a more ambitious project, such as the novel.

Wayne Ray founded HMS Press (1982) and co-founded the Canadian Poetry Association (1985), for which he has edited and produced several poetry anthologies. Some of them are: POEMATA, Tear The Rust Off My Heart, EOA: Prose, Golestaneh (Iran), Van Gogh's Ear: The Medusa Issue (Paris France). This is his second short story collection. He has also written essays.